Addressing disparities in cancer care: The role of multidisciplinary teams in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Cancer care in Malaysia faces significant disparities driven by socioeconomic status, geography, cultural beliefs, and access to timely services. Many patients are diagnosed at advanced stages of breast, colorectal, and lung cancers due to low health literacy, financial barriers, and fragmented care. This presentation explores how Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) can address these challenges. MDTs—comprising specialists such as oncologists, surgeons, radiologists, pathologists, nurses, and allied health professionals—offer coordinated, evidence-based care. Studies show they improve survival, speed up treatment, and enhance diagnostic accuracy. Patients benefit from clearer communication and better overall support. However, MDTs are not yet widely adopted in Malaysia. Resource shortages, inconsistent protocols, and limited infrastructure—particularly in rural areas—hinder broader implementation. Urban hospitals are more likely to have functional MDTs, while rural centres often lack the staff and digital tools needed. National initiatives like the National Strategic Plan for Cancer Control Programme (NSPCCP) and the City Cancer Challenge in Greater Petaling are working to expand access through training, standardisation, and technology support. Strengthening MDT use is an important step toward improving equity and outcomes in Malaysian cancer care.

Keywords: Multidisciplinary teams (MDTs), cancer care disparities, Malaysia, access and equity, national cancer initiatives